Lower Yellowstone River (278 River Miles)

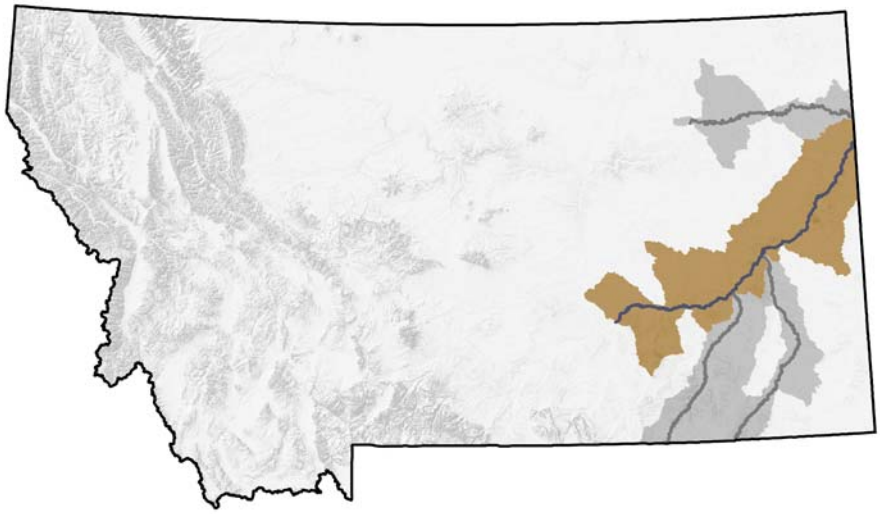

Figure 26. Lower Yellowstone River Focus Area

The French used the term *Roche Jaune,* meaning “yellow rock,” to describe the lower section of the Yellowstone River, which is lined with trees and meanders through yellow bluffs and rimrocks on its journey toward North Dakota. This reach of the river cuts through a country of plateaus and wind-carved sandstone. By the time the Yellowstone reaches the mouth of the Bighorn River, it has turned from a crystal clear, cold mountain stream into a warm plains river. As it flows north and east, it picks up strength from the Powder and Tongue rivers. In the Lower Yellowstone are found species such as sauger, burbot, and paddlefish.

Associated Habitats

Habitat Type	Habitat Tier	Acres	Miles
Lowland Lakes	III	6,577	
Lowland Reservoirs	III	1,119	
Mixed Source Rivers (Intermountain and Prairie Flow)	II		278
Mountain Lakes	III	251	
Mountain Reservoirs	III	177	
Prairie Streams	I		11,326

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 65 aquatic species that are found within the Lower Yellowstone River Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 30.

Fish: Pallid Sturgeon, Paddlefish, Shortnose Gar, Sturgeon Chub, Sicklefin Chub, Pearl Dace, Blue Sucker, Burbot, and Sauger

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Dewatering as a result of water diversion	Work with public and private land owners to improve efficiency of water use in order to maximize water return
	Protect instream flow reservations
Water chemistry problems due to irrigation return water and the discharge of wastewater from coal bed methane operations, and other sources	Support cooperative efforts to minimize impacts of return water due to sedimentation, increased salinity and temperature alteration
Riprap and other streambank stabilization work	Work with new stabilization projects to reduce impacts and support efforts to restore existing rip-rap areas to natural condition
	Develop statewide riparian best management principles
Invasive non-native fish species	Programs to control invasive species and promote natural habitats that support native species
Entrainment of juvenile and adult fishes by irrigation diversions or other water intakes	Screening or modification of irrigation diversions or other water intakes in a manner that prevents entrainment of fishes
Riparian vegetation effected by range and forest management practices and streamside residential development (such activities destabilize streambanks, increase sediment inputs, reduced shading, and remove woody debris)	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices in riparian areas
Modification and degradation of stream channels caused by various construction or land management practices	Restoration of stream channels or streambanks to a condition that simulates their natural form and function

	Modification of riparian management practices such that riparian vegetation is allowed to recover
	Develop statewide riparian best management principles
Alterations of the quantity or timing of stream flows, causing dewatering or unnatural flow fluctuations that diminish the quantity or quality of essential habitats	Implementation of various water conservation or flow management practices that restore essential habitats, simulate the natural hydrograph and also protect instream flows
Culverts, dams, irrigation diversions, and other instream barriers that fully or partially impede fish movement and reduce connectivity of habitat	Removal or modification of barriers in a manner that restores fish passage